

# Agriculture

California is the largest producer of agricultural products in the nation and agriculture plays an important role in the life and economy of the 14th Congressional district. Farmers in San Mateo, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties contribute nearly \$1 billion million to our region's economy producing a wide variety of specialty crops (see tables below). Our local farmers also serve as models on conservation, and many are embracing organic growing techniques.

In 2006, Congress will begin the process of reauthorizing of the Farm Security Act, which will set the nation's agriculture policy for the next several years. Several issues will be of particular importance to farmers in our communities.

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## Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act

For too long, federal farm policy has focused on providing price supports for commodity crops such as wheat, corn, and cotton, while ignoring the needs of specialty crop growers (i.e., growers of fruit, vegetables, flowers, and nursery products). To address the needs of this diverse group of growers without creating new costly and unwanted subsidies, Rep. Eshoo supported passage of the Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act in 2004. This important new law provides block grants to help states to assist specialty-crop growers in building markets for their goods. The Act also seeks to speed the processing of export permits for specialty-crop growers and gives funding priority for research into diseases that attack specialty crops.

## Country of Origin Labeling

Rep. Eshoo voted for Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) as part of the 2002 Farm Security Act, but time and again Congressional opponents have succeeded in delaying the implementation of this important initiative, which helps growers market their products and helps consumers learn where the food they buy comes from. The program is now scheduled to come on-line in 2008.

## Organic Farming and Labeling

As has been the case with specialty crops, federal policy has been slow to embrace organic growers. As a member of the House Organic Caucus, Rep. Eshoo has consistently supported funding for organic farming within the federal budget. She has worked to uphold the original rules governing the labeling of products as "organic." Regrettably, those rules were weakened under an amendment added to the fiscal year 2006 Department of Agriculture funding bill. The new law makes it easier to introduce non-organic and synthetic ingredients into foods bearing the "organic" label.

### Related resources:

- USDA National Organic Program: Information for Consumers
- Organic Farming Research Institute, Santa Cruz

## Combating Pests and Disease

Preventing exotic pests and disease from spreading through our crops is major concern among growers. Rep. Eshoo has been a leader in this area.

### Sudden Oak Death

In the last five years, a new threat to our region's agricultural economy has been Sudden Oak Death (SOD), a fungus (*Phytophthora ramorum*) that is destroying oak, fir, and redwood trees in California and the Pacific Northwest. Following the detection of *P. ramorum* in San Mateo County several years ago, the USDA put local nursery growers under quarantine and prevented the shipment of their products anywhere outside the county. In 2004, a state-wide quarantine was implemented. Rep. Eshoo worked with local producers and the USDA to lift the blanket

quarantine, initiate a sensible policy that prevents the spread of the disease, and allow growers to once again ship their products throughout the U.S. and Canada.

## Pierce's Disease

As a member of the Congressional Wine Caucus, Rep. Eshoo has supported efforts to secure the essential funding to combat Pierce's Disease and its vector, the glassy-winged sharpshooter - an invasive species. Winegrape growers throughout our region are under threat from Pierce's Disease which destroys grapevines and other crops from alfalfa to peaches.

## Pest Exclusion

A major threat to agriculture and the environment is the introduction of invasive and non-native species. Rep. Eshoo has been a supporter of funding pest detection and exclusion efforts in the Bay Area. She is also a cosponsor of the Pest Detection and Surveillance Improvement Act, which would allow the USDA to work with states on programs that seek to detect and prevent the introduction of non-native pests. The bill is pending before the House Agriculture Committee.

## District Agricultural Product by County

### San Mateo County

Value of agricultural production, 2004: \$181.5 million

Potted flowers (orchids, lilies, poinsettia)  
\$77.5 million

Outdoor grown flower & nursery crops  
\$39.8 million

Vegetables (artichokes, beans, brussels sprouts, leeks, mushrooms, peas, pumpkins, and misc.)

\$29.8 million

Potted foliage plants  
\$21.2 million

Cut flowers (lilies, iris)  
\$7.7 million

## Santa Clara County

Value of agricultural production, 2004: \$258.3 million

Nursery crops  
\$94.6 million

Mushrooms  
\$53.9 million

Peppers (bell, wax, and chilli)  
\$34 million

Cut flowers  
\$9.6 million

Steers and heifers  
\$7.2 million

Wing grapes  
\$6.1 million

## Santa Cruz County

Value of agricultural production, 2004: \$448 million

Strawberries  
\$194.8 million

Raspberries  
\$101.4million

Landscape plants  
\$27.1 million

Indoor cut flowers  
\$14.7 million

Misc. vegetables  
\$13 million

Related resources:

- San Mateo Agriculture
- Santa Clara Agriculture Commission
- Santa Cruz Agriculture Commissioner